JAPAN'S ECOMARK

Introduction

The EcoMark program, the second oldest ecolabeling program after Blue Angel, was started in February 1989 as a positive seal-of-approval program to "disseminate information on the environmental aspects of products and to encourage consumers to choose environmentally sound products." The program is implemented by the Japan Environment Association (JEA), a non-governmental organization, under the guidance of the Environment Agency. As of June 1997, the program has issued 2,031 awards in 69 product categories.

Two studies have been conducted to evaluate the influence of the EcoMark. Both indicate that the EcoMark is becoming well known. The first was a survey of local governments, distributors and companies with EcoMark-approved products, conducted by the JEA in the Spring of 1991. More than half of the companies who had acquired the logo did so to improve their corporate image, citing also "requests from customers and increased sales." Almost all local governments were aware of the program, compared to only 40 percent of distributors. The other study, a 1990 public opinion poll conducted by the Prime Minister's Office, found that 22.3 percent of the respondents said that they were familiar with the EcoMark. By 1993, this rate had jumped to 53 percent.

Recent Developments

The EcoMark program has undergone several changes in the past few years. First, the number of awards has actually decreased. Two product categories have been eliminated: spray containers not containing CFCs, abolished December 1993; and cans with stay-on tabs, abolished June 1995. In addition, consolidation of the pulp and paper industries has resulted in a decrease in the number of paper brands receiving awards (decreasing number of paper companies leads to decreases in the number of paper brands). The program has recently added two product categories, printing ink and recycled suitcases, to its list. Because the program seeks to label a small percentage of products within a product category, categories can either become more stringent or be abolished altogether if the labeled product market share is too large. The EcoMark program is in the process of revising 16 product category criteria to become more stringent based on new manufacturing procedures. It is expected that more currently labeled products reapplying for the label will fail, limiting the market share of awarded labels to only those products meeting the very highest environmental standards.

The program has also revised its methodology for selecting product categories and awarding labels. Originally, the EcoMark program based selection on the finished products' attributes, and did not incorporate the manufacturing processes of individual products within a category. In this way the logo was used more to call attention to products that were part of "an ecological lifestyle," than to weigh the relative impacts of consumer products throughout the life cycle. The process was also generally not open for comment from the public. These procedures were revised in March 1996 to

conform to the draft ISO 14024 standards. The program now employs the use of life-cycle analysis, consults with related parties, and provides for public review of draft criteria.

Program Summary

The EcoMark Secretariat is located within the Japan Environment Association, as are the two committees (the Promotion Committee and the Expert Committee) responsible for administering the program. The Secretariat sets up a working group of experts and concerned persons for each product category under consideration. This group then establishes draft criteria using life-cycle analysis, which are publicized in *EcoMark News* for 60 days for public comment. The draft criteria are submitted, with the incorporated suggestions, to the Promotion Committee (composed of specialists in environmental conservation, administrative agencies, consumer groups, and relevant enterprises), which then approves or rejects the criteria.

Once award criteria have been set, confidential product applications are accepted. Manufacturers must supply relevant information to the Expert Committee (composed of experts in environmental impact assessment), but the Committee may request further testing by a third party. If a product is awarded a label, a two-year contract is signed with the JEA. While JEA does not directly monitor for misuse, it relies on other manufacturers, administrative organizations, and consumer organizations to inform it of possible instances of misuse.

Unlike most environmental certification programs, the fee charged for use of the award is based on the retail price of the product, not the number of units sold or the market share. The annual license fee is between 40,000 (348 USD) and 100,000 yen (870 USD). Additionally, the Japanese program is unusual in that there is no application or advertising fee.

Program Methodology

As mentioned above, the Japanese EcoMark program recently changed its methodology to incorporate life-cycle assessments, specifically a life-cycle matrix, which considers the environmental impacts within each stage of the product life cycle. This change was made as a response to draft labeling standards being developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). In assessing products, the EcoMark utilizes literature and other programs' life-cycle assessments, as well as independent testing and studies and information from participating producers. Additionally, information about product criteria from other programs may also be adopted by the Japanese EcoMark program, where applicable. Japan does not follow SETAC guidelines in their life-cycle-analysis.

Once product selection by the EcoMark office and the Expert Committee is completed, the EcoMark office sets up ad hoc working groups for each product group to develop labeling criteria. Product selection is based on proposals from manufacturers as well as the use of a political process in consideration with the environmental impacts of the product. Product criteria, based on the life-cycle matrix approach and at each stage of the product's life cycle, considers the following factors:

extraction and processing of raw materials; manufacturing, transportation, and distribution of the product; the product uses; potential for reuse; potential for recycling; and emission of wastes, toxic substances, and harmful pollutants.

Other Information

The program is open to participation by small and medium sized businesses; more than 75 percent of the manufacturers awarded are small or medium in size.

JEA is a member of GEN, which it finds very useful, not only for information exchange but also for assisting ecolabeling programs worldwide with program information and for the removal of unnecessary trade barriers. When criteria are being developed and revised, JEA collects data on all criteria in similar product categories via the GEN database and uses these to guide its development. In accordance with the draft ISO 14024 standards, existing criteria are revised within three years (16 of the 69 current award criteria are in the revision stage).

EcoMark has a strong relationship with procurement programs. For example, the central government is in the process of establishing guidelines for green procurement and references the EcoMark as one possible source of information. Some of the more progressive local governments have already established green procurement guidelines and also reference the EcoMark.

According to JEA, the program has not been involved in any critical trade conflicts to date. In fact, JEA has shown initiative in addressing trade issues before a conflict can arise. For example, in 1996, JEA made a concerted effort to get input from the US on the trade implications of developing product categories for personal computers and copy machines. By including the US in its process, it hoped to avoid any trade conflicts.

Similar to the ecolabeling program, the Green Purchasing Network (GPN) was created in February 1996. The GPN is sponsored by the Environment Agency of Japan, and consists of organizations committed to reducing stress on the environment by promoting green purchasing. Thus far, 425 companies, 107 local governments and government agencies, and 97 non-profit organizations are members. The GPN establishes purchasing guidelines in product categories, publishes annual guidebooks concerning the environmental impact of products, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and conducts meetings. Although the GPN program and the EcoMark are independent of each other, the GPN has a significant influence on the EcoMark.

References

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Product Categories (number of awarded products in parentheses)

Final Categories

Spray products not containing CFC's (abolished)
Triangle strainers for kitchen sinks (16)
Strainers for kitchen sinks (28)
Filter bags for kitchen disposal (155)
Absorbents for used cooking oil (34)
Composting containers (30)
Magazines and books on environmental problems (20)
Toilet paper using 100 percent recycled paper (85)
Returnable containers (11)
Containers for collecting used bottles (0)
Soap made from used cooking oil (47)
Products made from used lumber (25)
Products made from used plastic (211)
Cans with stay on tabs (abolished)
Recycled paper for office use (102)
Recycled paper for printing (237)
Recycled paper for stationary (137)
Recycled paper for packaging (184)
Hot water supply systems using solar energy (3)
Cellulose sponges (39)
Cloth diapers for infants (44)

Products made from used tires (33)
Thermal insulation for buildings (3)
Tissue paper using recycled paper (11)
Biodegradable engine oil for two-cycle engines (7)
Products using solar battery modules (2)
Straw matting (9)
Flow-reducing valves and water-saving faucets (13)
Soundproof and vibration proof mats (3)
Blast furnace and fine powder slag and blast furnace cement (7)
Refillable containers (60)
Unbleached coffee filters (10)
Paint containing no aromatic hydrocarbon compounds (87)
Filters for cooking oil (6)
Boards made from waste wood (51)
Waste can collectors (7)
Drainage fixtures for rainwater dissipation (7)
Storage tanks for rainwater (0)
Packing materials made from recycled pulp (35)
Wallpaper, fusuma paper and shoji paper made from recycled pulp (36)
Filter bags of recycled paper for vacuum cleaners (7)
Tiles and blocks made from waste material (12)
Household gloves of natural rubber (22)
Unbleached clothes. bed linen, and towels (32)
CFC recovery systems for air conditioners (2)
Biodegradable hydraulic oil (10)
Biodegradable lubricant oil (18)
Cloth shopping bags (20)
Multi-pass thermal transfer ribbons (1)
Wooden products made of culled logs and small-diameter logs (13)
Textiles made of waste fibers (15)
Briquettes made of waste (2)
Low-waste printers for business machines (5)
Replaceable ink cartridges and ribbon cassettes (3)
Resource conserving containers for edible oils (12)
Recycled paving materials (4)
Fancy sound-absorption panels of iron-slag mineral wool (5)
Laminated fiberboard of recycled pulp (7)
Combustion apparatus using waste cooking oil (0)
Buffer materials made of culled logs and used timber (0)
Vegetation supporting concrete paving blocks (1)
Energy saving gas leak detectors (2)
Load-stabilizing devices for energy conservation (4)
Products made from recycled cullet (14)

Building materials of fly ash (1)
Clothing made of used PET resin (10)
Inert-gas smothering systems and apparatuses using no ozone-layer depleting gases (3)
Easily repairable office chairs (7)
Low-benzene gasoline for vehicles (2)
Agricultural mulch sheeting of recycled pulp (1)
Solar-powered clock or watch (1)